



## **LEST WE FORGET. A PRELIMINARY MAP OF THE COLLECTIVE EARTHQUAKE RITUALS OF ITALY**

**Viviana CASTELLI<sup>1</sup>**

### **SUMMARY**

Fear and the need for reassurance - feelings as old as humankind – find cultural expression in countless visible ways: beliefs and behaviour patterns, rules and rituals, good and bad habits. However, there is also an invisible “non-way” to express them, by dismissing from the mind and forgetting as soon as possible whatever it was that made us afraid and needing reassurance. In the case of communities living in “earthquake country” this kind of reaction does seem a predictable, indeed almost an obligated one: how could people go on living in places that were repeatedly and tragically affected by seismic disasters, unless by getting used quickly to forget the worst of their past sufferings? But is the tendency to remove and forget an hereditary trait of humankind, or the results of specific stimuli (more likely to occur in some social environments than in others)? The traditional popular culture of Italy, as outlined by the preliminary results of a survey of collective rituals connected with earthquakes, appears to have been much keener on remembering past disasters than on removing their memory: so keen, in fact, that it still does preserve the memory of earthquakes that no seismic catalogue has recorded so far. The educational value and potential uses of this patrimony of shared memories are very interesting indeed.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Fear and its corollary, the need for reassurance and protection, are feelings as old as humankind, that every culture had to learn to cope with in its own way. There are positive ways of coping, by developing mechanisms (beliefs, behaviours, rules, rituals, myths, scientific theories, theological explanations to name a few) that help to accept/explain/set in context the fear, thus keeping it in check (*vide* Delumeau, [1978; 1983; 1989]). And there are negative ways, by which one strives to forget, as soon and as well as possible, whatever it was that made one afraid and needing reassurance. Each way has its pros and cons, the ultimate choice being, most often, dictated by circumstances as well as by the general cultural outlook of the involved parties

Unsettling, uncontrollable and potentially dangerous natural phenomena, such as the earthquakes, must rank high among major sources of personal and collective fear. It has, in fact, been argued that communities living in highly seismic areas and unable for whatever reason (e.g. economic ones) to relocate elsewhere, must need to have a short memory-span, in order to avoid succumbing to desperation. How could people carry on with life in places that have been tragically and repeatedly stricken by seismic disasters, unless by getting used to forget past traumas as quickly as possible? The unbearable anguish caused by the earthquake must be “removed” from the victims’ consciousness: thus argued Grassi Fiorentino [1984] in her study of central Italian communities stricken by the seismic sequence of 1703 (which included two main events with Io XI MCS and X MCS respectively [CPTI Working Group, 2004]). But is it really, invariably and inescapably so, one wonders? Is a tendency to remove and forget past unpleasantnesses an inbuilt trait of humankind? An earthquake (or any other sudden, unpleasant and disruptive event) is undoubtedly something that needs reacting to, both on the material and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Sezione di Bologna, at Regione Marche, Ctr. Passo Varano 1, 60029 Varano (AN), Italy  
Email: castelli@bo.ingv.it

spiritual levels; but is forgetfulness the only spiritual reaction evolved by humankind along the ages? It depends, both on the cultural context in which the earthquake happens, and on its basic tenets.

Let's take, for instance, the case of mainstream western culture. Up to a comparatively recent past, religion was its mainstay. Today, on the contrary, mainstream western culture is decidedly secularised: religion is still important for many people but it does not determine anymore most cultural, political, and social choices [Wilson, 1991], a role in which it has been superseded by science, or rather by technology. Such a difference in general attitude did not, in past centuries, influence the type of material responses to earthquakes: even in the Darkest of Dark Middle Ages ruined buildings had to be restored and victims to be dug up. Nor did their deep religiosity keep people from knowing that phenomena such as the earthquakes were "part of imponderable nature" [Rohr, 2003]: at any time in history scientific explanations were available for the learned, and the unlearned had past experience, their own and their forefathers', to fall back on. It did, however, make a difference for what concerned the spiritual response: if it is normal for you to think that everything material has a spiritual meaning too, it is as normal to see an earthquake both as a natural event with material consequences and at the same time as a supernatural "sign" meant to warn you that something is not going as well as it should in your personal/community life. The mainstream responses to such warnings were private/public expressions of piety/penitence (temporary and permanent) and - if religious denomination allowed - the seeking of supernatural patronage (by the Madonna or some saint). All these responses privileged memory over forgetfulness: selective memory maybe, stressing the positive aspects of the experience (survival) but memory all the same. On the contrary, the contemporary mainstream, "global village" culture seems much more prone to forgetfulness than the erstwhile one: the swiftness with which the modern mass media can bring the latest events to everyone's attention in real time ensures yesterday's drama to be superseded by another tomorrow. All the more so as the occurrence of dramatic natural events challenges this culture's basic view of humankind as owner and master of its own destiny, engendering unsecureness and depression. In such a context, unless the calamity occurs in one's own backyard (often, indeed, even when it does), forgetting it as quickly as possible is a predictable, even understandable reaction. Things change, however, if one takes into account that older and more traditional popular culture which, in Italy at least, is still vital and more inclined to preserve the remembrance of earthquakes past than to remove it.

## **2. COLLECTIVE EARTHQUAKE RITUALS IN ITALY: WHAT, WHERE, WHY?**

### **2.1 What?**

Table 1 gives a list of approximately eighty Italian communities that, after experiencing an earthquake, developed a ritual, i.e. a customary observance or practice that is enacted - usually once a year, on a given date (generally the anniversary of the day in which the earthquake occurred/stopped, occasionally on the feast-day of a saint deemed to have protected the community). Most of the rituals listed in Table 1 have been kept without interruptions from their inception to the present day and are still currently observed with the active participation of all/most community members. A few examples of rituals whose observance was discontinued in the last decades have been added for the sake of completeness.

Each ritual is self-contained and exclusive, being carried out by a single community (a single diocese, a single administrative region) in a way uniquely its own. At the same time, however, all are motivated by the same basic need, namely preserving a memory and transmitting it to posterity. Sometimes it is the memory of a danger from which the community managed to escape more or less unscathed. Sometimes it is the memory of a loss suffered and shared by the whole community, in terms of lost human lives or of the trauma undergone when the community as a whole had to eradicate itself, to abandon the original site of its settlement - made unfit to live in by the earthquake - in favour of a new one placed in a less dangerous situation. The collective earthquake rituals can take several forms: a procession, mass or especially elaborate festival (with both religious and civil features) kept on the anniversary day; a pilgrimage directed toward a particularly venerated shrine or sometimes toward the ruins of the old, earthquake-shattered church of the deserted settlement from which the community had to flee centuries ago to seek a less difficult location; a special devotion for a religious icon that was rescued unscathed from the ruins of an earthquake-shattered church; some formal expression of penitence and respect, such as the observance of a fast-day, reciting prayers, lighting candles or ringing bells in remembrance of the earthquake victims; a ceremonial bonfire, which symbolically recalls to mind the fires once lit by the community people during a night passed in the open, waiting for earthquake shocks to abate. Sometimes it is no more than a local adjustment to the normal calendar of feast-days: the local starting date of Carnival is set later than it would be customary in Italy (mostly it should start on January 17 or, sometimes, on January 7), or a

religious festival is kept on a different day from the one appointed for it in the ordinary calendar. Whatever the practice, starting it is a collective decision, observing it a commitment shared by the community and often solemnized by the formal drawing up of a contract entered by the municipal representatives of the community as a public and official “perpetual vow” [Angelotti et al., 2003].

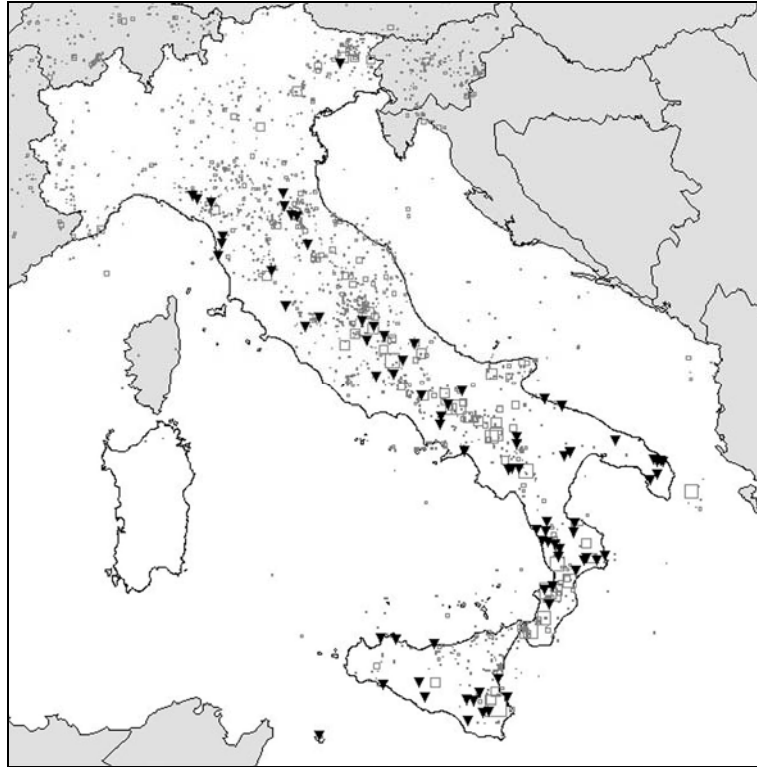
**Table 1: A preliminary survey of collective earthquake rituals in Italy**

LOCALITY	LATIT	LONGI	DATE EVENT	TYPE RITUAL	STATE
Sequals	46.164	12.829	1812 10 25	Votive mass	Current
Castel S Pietro Terme	44.398	11.590	1779 06 04	Votive mass	Current
Vignola	44.388	9.855	1834 02 14	Votive pilgrimage/offering	Current
Filattiera	44.331	9.936	1903 07 27	Votive mass/festival	Current
Sassalbo	44.289	10.194	1481 05 07	Votive mass/festival	Current
Casola	44.164	10.996	1725 10 28	Votive mass/festival	Current
Tredozio	44.079	11.743	1661 03 22	Procession	Current
Rocca S Casciano	44.060	11.842	1661 03 22	Procession	Current
Ripafratta	43.816	10.415	1846 08 14	Votive pilgrimage	Current
Pisa	43.716	10.401	1846 08 14	Special prayer	Discontinued
Pieve S Stefano	43.670	12.041	1731 03 11	Votive procession	Current
Livorno	43.550	10.321	1742 01 27	Votive pilgrimage Carnival later than normal	Current
Siena	43.321	11.328	1846 08 14	Votive mass	Current
Santa Fiora	42.831	11.586	1778 05 03	Votive procession	Current
Castiglione in Teverina	42.646	12.204	1703 01 14	Votive procession	Current
Vallunga di Leonessa	42.580	13.002	1703 01 14	Votive mass	Current
Marta	42.535	11.925	1703 01 14	Votive procession	Current
Petrella Salto	42.294	13.068	1915 01 13	Votive procession	Current
Marana di Montereale	42.494	13.222	1915 01 13	Votive procession	Current
Bolognaro	42.217	13.961	1915 01 13	Religious festival	Current
Ortona dei Marsi	41.997	13.728	1915 01 13	Votive procession	Current
Fiuggi	41.802	13.224	1915 01 13	Religious festival	Current
Roccavivi	41.812	13.536	1915 01 13	Religious festival	Current
Jelsi	41.518	14.796	1805 07 26	Religious festival	Current
Venafrò	41.485	14.044	1688 06 05	Religious festival	Current
Cusano Mutri	41.338	14.507	1805 07 26	Votive procession	Current
Barletta	41.318	16.279	1731 03 20	Religious festival	Current
Molfetta	41.200	16.597	1560 05 11	Votive pilgrimage	Current
Caiazzo	41.177	14.367	1805 07 26	Ceremonial ringing of bells	Current
Caserta	41.071	14.333	1702 03 14	Religious festival	Current
Gianturco	40.814	15.721	1857 12 16	Votive procession	Current
Avigliano	40.730	15.717	1857 12 16	Votive procession	Current
Salerno	40.679	14.765	1688 06 05	Votive procession	Current
Ceglie Messapico	40.645	17.516	1743 02 20	Votive procession	Discontinued
Montescaglioso	40.552	16.666	1857 12 16	Religious festival	Current
Pomarico	40.514	16.549	1657 01 --	Religious festival/votive offering	Current
Sala Consilina (a)	40.398	15.596	1857 12 16	Votive procession	Current
Sala Consilina (b)			1980 11 23	Votive pilgrimage/mass	
Teggiano	40.378	15.540	1857 12 16	Religious festival	Current
Paterno	40.377	15.732	1857 12 16	Votive procession	Current
Lecce (a)	40.351	18.169	1743 02 12	Religious festival	Current
Lecce (b)			1833 01 19	Votive mass/ offering	
Strudà	40.319	18.281	1833 01 19	Memorial bonfire	Current
Acquarica di Lecce	40.306	18.315	1833 01 19	Memorial bonfire	Current
Lizzanello	40.302	18.223	1833 01 19	Memorial bonfire	Current
Cutrofiano	40.125	18.200	1810 02 17	Memorial bonfire	Current
Alezio	40.061	18.057	1886 08 27	Religious festival	Current
Roggiano Gravina	39.615	16.157	1908 12 02	Religious festival	Current
Rossano	39.574	16.635	1836 04 24	Memorial bonfire	Current
Cetraro	39.516	15.941	1836 04 24	Religious festival	Current
S Martino di Finita	39.489	16.108	1854 02 12	Religious festival	Current
Longobucco	39.449	16.611	1870 10 04	Votive procession	Current
Paola (a)	39.360	16.040	1638 03 27	Religious festival	Current
Paola (b)			1783 02 05	Religious festival	Current
Paola (c)			1905 09 08	Religious festival	Current

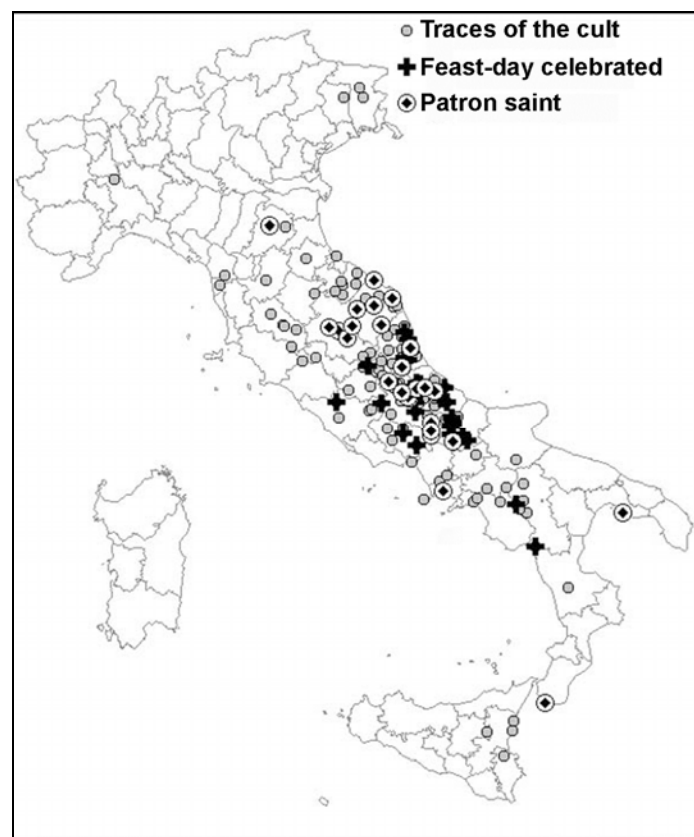
Bucita	39.348	16.131	1905 09 08	Religious festival	Current
San Fili	39.338	16.144	1854 02 12	Religious festival	Current
Cosenza	39.303	16.251	1836 04 25	Religious festival	Current
Aprigliano	39.239	16.342	1783 02 05	Religious festival	Current
Scigliano	39.127	16.306	1783 02 05	Religious festival	Current
Crotone	39.080	17.127	1832 03 08	Votive mass/procession	Current
Mesoraca	39.077	16.789	1744 03 21	Votive procession/fast day	Current
Petrona	39.043	16.758	1832 03 08	Votive procession	Current
Cutro	39.033	16.982	1832 03 08	Lamps lighted in memory of EQ victims	Current
Catanzaro	38.914	16.586	1783 02 05	Religious festival	Current
Pizzo	38.733	16.159	1614 11 24	Lamps lighted to remember EQ victims EQ destroyed village	Current
Potenzoni	38.689	16.003	1735 09 06	Religious	Current
Calabria (whole region)	00.000	00.000	1783 02 05	Prayers for souls of EQ victims on Friday Funeral Mass on February 5	Up to the 1980's ?
Plaesano	38.473	16.076	1783 02 05	Pilgrimage to destroyed village	Current
Sicily (whole region)	00.000	00.000	1693 01 11	Carnival starts later than normal	Current
Terrasini	38.151	13.084	1726 09 01	Ceremonial ringing of bells Lamps lighted to remember EQ victims	Current
Palermo	38.121	13.353	1726 09 01	Ceremonial ringing of bells Lamps lighted to remember EQ victims	Current
Cefalù	38.036	14.020	1783 02 05	Religious festival	Current
Campofranco	37.511	13.714	1693 01 11	Religious festival	Current
Sciacca	37.508	13.083	1578 ?? ??	Votive procession	Current
Catania	37.502	15.087	1693 01 11	Religious festival on January 14	Current
Palagonia	37.326	14.746	1693 01 11	Votive mass	Current
Naro	37.295	13.793	1693 01 11	Votive procession	Current
Caltagirone	37.231	14.520	1693 01 11	Memorial bonfire	Current
Augusta	37.231	15.221	1693 01 11	Mass for EQ victims'souls	until 1960's
Grammichele	37.214	14.636	1693 01 11	Cult for icon from EQ destroyed village	Current
Palazzolo Acreide	37.062	14.903	1693 01 11	Cult for icon from EQ destroyed building	Current
Giarratana	37.048	14.794	1693 01 11	Cult for icon from EQ destroyed village Votive procession	Current
Vittoria	36.950	14.532	1693 01 11	Votive pilgrimage	Current
Pantelleria	36.829	11.943	1891 10 14	Votive procession	Current

## 2.2 Where?

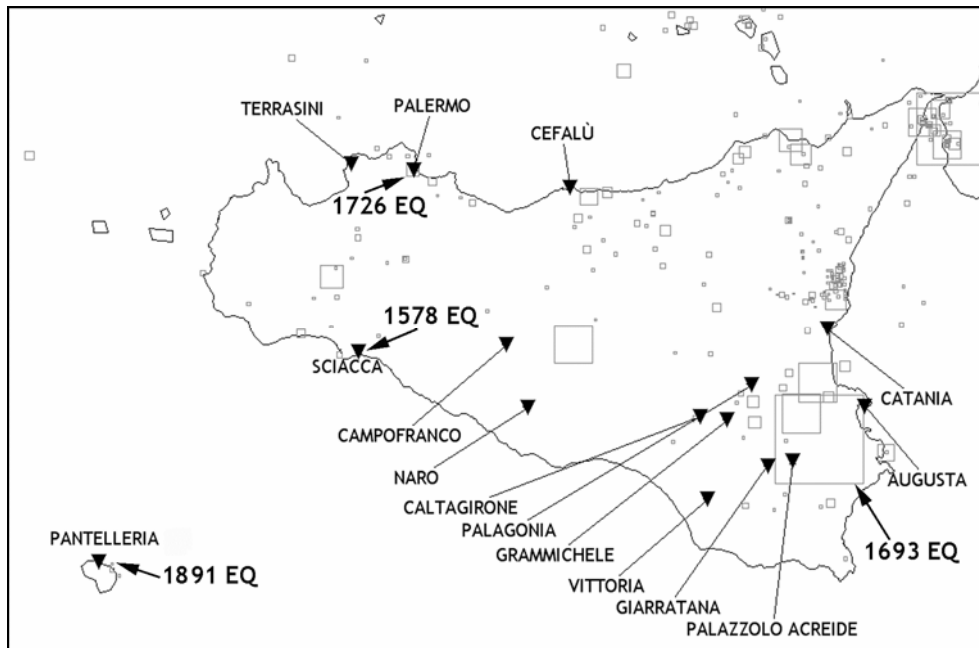
The geographic distribution of the localities cited in Tab. 1 is shown in Fig. 1. For a correct appreciation of the actual cultural relevance of the data presented in this figure, two things should be kept in mind. The first is that the survey, whose results were used to prepare Tab. 1 is a preliminary one and, consequently, that the picture presented in Fig. 1 is likely to be not exhaustive. The second thing to remember is that collective earthquake rituals are only a facet of a much larger complex of traditional religious or semi-religious practices that could be generally defined as “spiritual strategies for seismic risk reduction”, the traces of whose existence can be found in the past and present cultural life of the Italian people. The ongoing census of Italian collective earthquake rituals followed two main criteria in selecting relevant items: contemporaneity (i.e. the rituals must be periodically observed and currently in observance) and popularity (i.e. the rituals must be carried on by the initiative and with the concurrence and approval of the whole community or a large majority of its members). Therefore, the picture shown in Fig. 1 does not take into account the rituals that were once observed but have been discontinued in a more or less recent past, the one-off rituals (observed in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake and/or for a period meant from the start to be finite) and the profusion of other devotional measures such as the raising of memorial churches or other religious monuments and the cult tributed to saints deemed to have protected/to be able to protect their devotees from the dangers of earthquakes, a phenomenon whose extent can be gauged by looking at a preliminary map of the diffusion of the most successful of these saints (Fig. 2).



**Figure 1: A preliminary map of Italian collective earthquake rituals**  
*(Black triangles: localities listed in Tab. 1; Grey squares: Italian earthquakes [CPTI Working Group, 2004])*



**Figure 2: The cult of an “antiseismic saint” (St Emidius) in Italy.**  
*(From Castelli and Camassi [2006] modified)*



**Figure 3: Collective earthquake rituals in Sicily and the earthquakes originating them**

### 2.3 Why?

Most of the collective earthquake rituals listed in Tab. 1 are connected with historical earthquakes whose occurrence is listed in the current Italian earthquake catalogues (Tab. 2). These include both major destructive seismic sequences whose macroseismic fields were extremely extensive and whose fame went even further afield (such as those of 1693 in Sicily or 1783 in Calabria) and minor, local events. It must be kept in mind, however, that relative size and fame are by no means a necessary requirement in order for a collective earthquake ritual to be started. In the Sicilian case (shown in Fig. 2), ten out of fifteen cases of collective earthquake rituals so far identified are related to the great seismic disaster of 1693 and another (Cefalù) to one of the non-regional but extremely dramatic Calabrian 1783 earthquakes; the remaining cases, however, concern local, often not even particularly “strong”, earthquakes (a trait that could find even better definition should this picture be upgraded by adding data concerning the regional diffusion of other instances of “seismo-related” devotional practices such as were mentioned in § 2.2).

There are, however, some cases in which the earthquakes thus locally celebrated are not listed by any of the extant Italian seismic catalogues (Tab. 3). Some of them were listed in the first parametric earthquake catalogue of Italy [Postpischl, 1985], with middle to low epicentral intensities and/or imprecise epicentral locations; they were not included in subsequent catalogues pending further investigation; the findings of this study could help towards a better definition of their parameters. In a couple of cases, the absence of the ritual-originating earthquakes from the Italian catalogues is motivated by their having been epicentrally located quite far from the immediate surroundings of Italy; this is a curious enough situation, and one that poses probably unanswerable questions: what is that makes a far-off earthquake more memorable, for a community, than any of the stronger (or at least as strong) local earthquakes that it is likely to have experienced as well? Finally, and most interestingly, in a couple of cases our collective rituals perpetuate the memory of “unknown” local earthquakes: for more details on the interesting Tuscan case of Pieve S. Stefano, where a ritual started in 1731 to commemorate a locally distressing, if comparatively “minor” earthquake, proved tenacious enough not to be discontinued even after the locality was nearly destroyed by a flood in the mid-1800’s and again by bombs during WW2, *vide* Castelli [2004].

It should also be noted that earthquakes are by no means the only natural events thus commemorated in Italy. Table 4 lists a few instances of collective rituals whose originating event was a volcanic eruption (namely the Vesuvius eruption of December 8 1861; the Etna eruption of February 1792; and the submarine volcanic eruption of January 28, 1831 responsible for the emersion, off the southern Sicilian coast, of the short-lived Isola Ferdinanda, a.k.a. Graham Island).

**Table 2: Main parameters of ritual-originating earthquakes listed in the latest Italian catalogue (CPTI Working Group 2004)**

DATE	EPICENTRAL AREA	Io (MCS)	LATIT	LONGI	Mw
1481 May 7	Lunigiana	VIII-IX	44.276	10.130	5.84
1560 May 11	Barletta-Bisceglie	VIII	41.250	16.480	5.67
1578 ?? ??	Sciacca	VII	37.508	13.083	5.17
1638 Mar 27	Calabria	XI	39.030	16.280	7.00
1657 Jan ??	Apricena	VII	41.833	15.333	5.17
1661 Mar 22	Appennino romagnolo	IX	44.020	11.900	5.83
1688 Jun 5	Sannio	XI	41.280	14.570	6.72
1693 Jan 11	Sicilia orientale	XI	37.130	15.020	7.41
1702 Mar 14	Beneventano-Irpinia	IX-X	41.120	14.980	6.32
1703 Jan 14	Appennino reatino	XI	42.680	13.120	6.81
1703 Feb 2	Aquilano	X	42.470	13.200	6.65
1725 Oct 28	Faentino	VII	44.195	11.863	5.26
1726 Sep 1	Palermo	VIII	38.120	13.350	5.61
1731 Mar 20	Foggiano	IX	41.270	15.750	6.34
1735 Sep 6	Vibo Valentia	VI	38.677	16.129	4.83
1742 Jan 27	Livorno	VI-VII	43.550	10.320	5.15
1743 Feb 20	Basso Ionio	IX-X	39.850	18.780	6.90
1779 Jun 4	Bolognese	VI-VII	44.450	11.520	4.97
1777 Oct 5 (*)	Radicofani	VII-VIII	42.880	11.756	5.37
1783 Feb 5	Calabria	XI	38.300	15.970	6.91
1805 Jul 26	Molise	X	41.500	14.470	6.57
1812 Oct 25	Sequals	VIII-IX	46.027	12.589	5.70
1831 Jan 28	Milazzo	VI-VIII	38.224	15.240	5.03
1832 Mar 8	Crotonese	IX-X	39.070	16.900	6.48
1834 Feb 14	Alta Lunigiana	VIII-IX	44.449	9.859	5.64
1836 Apr 25	Calabria settent.	IX	39.570	16.730	6.16
1846 Aug 14	Orciano Pisano	VIII-IX	43.531	10.500	5.71
1854 Feb 12	Cosentino	IX-X	39.250	16.300	6.15
1857 Dec 16	Basilicata	X-XI	40.350	15.850	6.96
1870 Oct 4	Cosentino	IX-X	39.220	16.330	6.16
1903 Jul 27	Lunigiana	VII	44.329	9.953	5.15
1905 Sept 8	Calabria	XI	38.670	16.070	7.06
1907 Oct 23	Calabria meridionale	VIII-IX	38.130	16.020	5.93
1915 Jan 13	Avezzano	XI	42.013	13.530	6.99
1980 Nov 23	Irpinia-Basilicata	X	40.850	15.280	6.89
“??” Month/Day unknown					
(*) Earthquake nearest					

**Table 3: Ritual-originating earthquakes not listed in the current Italian catalogues**

DATE	QUOTED LOCALITY	DESCRIBED EFFECTS	NOTES
1614 Nov 24	Rocca Angitola	Locality was “destroyed”	Listed by Postpischl [1985]: EQ “in Calabria”, Io VII MCS
1731 Mar 11	Pieve Santo Stefano	Shocks for a month, some damage	Local unlisted EQ
1744 Mar 21	Mesoraca	Damage, no victims	Local unlisted EQ
1810 Feb 17	Cutrofiano	No damage; people slept in the open	Non-Italian EQ ( <b>Greece</b> )
1833 Jan 19	Lizzanello and Strudà Acquarica di Lecce	No damage; people slept in the open Some damage	Listed by Postpischl [1985] (Io not assessed)
1886 Aug 27	Alezio	Some damage	Non-Italian EQ ( <b>Greece</b> )

**Table 4: Collective rituals commemorating volcanic eruptions: a few cases**

LOCALITY	LATIT	LONGI	DATE EVENT	TYPE RITUAL	STATE
Torre del Greco	40.786	14.367	1861 12 08	Votive procession	Current
Zafferana Etnea	37.692	15.104	1792 02 11	Votive procession	Current
Pantelleria	36.829	11.943	1831 01 28	Votive procession	Current

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this preliminary survey of collective rituals meant to preserve the remembrance of past earthquakes suggest that the traditional popular culture of Italy is on the whole, more keen on remembering past dramatic episodes than to remove their memory, as witnessed by the stubbornness with which some Italian communities have clung, even for centuries, to the remembrance of the earthquakes whose very occurrence is ignored by seismic catalogues. Why some communities chose to remember such events, while others did not; why a community chose to preserve the memory of an earthquake over another, one cannot tell, unless one delves much more deeper in local history than the limits of this survey would have allowed, and maybe not even after that. For the time being it is enough to say that there are many such cases (over eighty at the most perfunctory census), that they occur all over Italy and that their very existence proves that they must mean something to the people that persist in keeping them up. In fact, the only sure thing about these rituals is that they survive because people want them to. Attempting to find a general explanation, one could venture to say that they undoubtedly answer – among other things – to the need of asserting the identity of a community as a live body that in the past had proved its ability to overcome hardships and to live on, one that is aware of its roots, even after having had to dig them up and to transplant them elsewhere. The observance of the ritual keep provides the spiritual glue necessary to keep the community together, and in touch with its past.

Such a patrimony of shared memories has, besides its undoubted value as a cultural heritage, a formidable psychological and educational value too. The communities that developed a collective earthquake ritual were finding a way to deal positively with a current calamity and also, ultimately, a way to keep up the communal earthquake awareness in prevision of possible future mishaps. Nowadays, as dramatic episodes worldwide point out - again and again - that the average level of social vulnerability is uncomfortably high even in the wealthiest and ostensibly more developed countries, an unpleasant but true fact begs to be acknowledged: faith in technology may have superseded religious faith but humankind has not automatically become either more rational or better equipped to cope with the unexpected than it was in less privileged times. As it is obvious that the most sophisticated Tools are rendered useless by Man's inadequacy, it remains a vital necessity to go back to the individual and start again to breed an awareness of the natural risks each person is most likely to be exposed to by living where he/she lives and of the "strategies of risk reduction" he/she is most likely to find useful in daily life. Forgetting the past is not the smartest choice in the long run: this is the lesson to be learned from the traditional Italian communities and their jealously preserved earthquake rituals.

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was partially funded by the Italian Dipartimento della Protezione Civile in the frame of the 2004-2006 Agreement with Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia - INGV.

### 5. REFERENCES

- Angelotti, V., Fedeli, M.I., Fucini, E. and Imperiali, I. (2003), A.D. 1703...Facciamo voto...: Il terremoto e l'impegno di fede della Comunità di Marta con la SS.ma Vergine, *Comune di Marta*, Marta.
- Castelli, V. (2004), Between Tevere and Arno. A preliminary revision of seismicity in the Casentino-Sansepolcro (Tuscany, Italy) area, *Bollettino di Geofisica Teorica e Applicata*, 45, n° 1-2, 35-49.
- Castelli, V. and Camassi, R. (2006), A che santo votarsi. L'influsso dei grandi terremoti del 1703 sulla cultura popolare, *Proceedings of the 2004 Meeting "Settecento abruzzese. Eventi sismici, mutamenti economico-sociali e ricerca storiografica"* (L'Aquila, Italy, October 29-31, 2004), *in press*.
- CPTI Working Group (2004), Catalogo Parametrico dei Terremoti Italiani (versione 2004, CPTI04): Internet website INGV Sezione di Milano, <http://emidius.mi.ingv.it/CPTI/> (last revision 27 May 2004).
- Delumeau, J. (1978), *La peur en Occident*, Fayard, Paris.
- Delumeau, J. (1983), *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident*, Fayard, Paris.
- Delumeau, J. (1989), *Rassurer et protéger: le sentiment de sécurité dans l'Occident d'autrefois*, Fayard, Paris.
- Grassi Fiorentino, S. (1984), «Nella sera della domenica...». Il terremoto del 1703 in Umbria: trauma e reintegrazione, *Quaderni storici*, 19, n° 55, 137-154.
- Postpischl, D. (1985), Catalogo dei terremoti italiani dall'anno 1000 al 1980, *Quaderni della Ricerca Scientifica*, 114 2B, Bologna.
- Rohr, Ch. (2003), Man and Natural Disaster in the Late Middle Ages: The Earthquake in Carinthia and Northern Italy on 25 January 1348 and its Perception, *Environment and History*, 19, 127-149.
- Wilson, B. (1991), 'Secularization': Religion in the Modern World. In: Sutherland, S. and Clarke, P. (eds.), *The Study of Religion. Traditional and New Religion*, Routledge, London, 195-208.